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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000169

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: GASPAROVIC'S RE-ELECTION: TAKING HIM AT HIS WORD

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 160

[¶](#)B. BRATISLAVA 158

[¶](#)C. BRATISLAVA 148

[¶](#)D. BRATISLAVA 128

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Keith Eddins, reasons 1.4 b/d

[¶](#)1. (C) Introduction and Summary: While the Slovak presidency is largely ceremonial, the incumbent can make life comfortable (or difficult) for the Prime Minister and the ruling coalition. The relationship between former Prime Minister Meciar and then-President Kovac was the most conflictual in Slovakia's short history, with Kovac openly decrying Meciar's heavy-handed undemocratic tactics. Meciar responded by having the Slovak secret services kidnap Kovac's son. In contrast, and particularly in the months leading up to the recent presidential election, Ivan Gasparovic has acted more like a loyal member of Prime Minister Fico's Smer party than a quasi-apolitical Head of State. Given the Prime Minister's immense popularity, it was no surprise that Gasparovic linked himself so overtly to Fico during the campaign.

[¶](#)2. (C) As we noted in earlier election reporting (refs a-c), a victory by Iveta Radicova would have strengthened the voice of the center right parties, providing a counterbalance to some of the verbal and policy excesses of the Fico Government. It also could have galvanized a disorganized and disheartened opposition, or at least boosted its confidence before the 2010 parliamentary elections. Now, the question is whether Gasparovic in his second and last term continues to be a rubber stamp for PM Fico's government, or whether he will be, as his domestic policy advisor pledged to us last year, "the most independent president" yet. We have our doubts, but we intend to remind President Gasparovic and his staff of his commitments, especially as they relate to support for the Transatlantic relationship and Slovak participation in Afghanistan. End Introduction and Summary.

The Hungarian Card: A Bitter Aftertaste

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[¶](#)3. (U) The oath of the President of the Slovak Republic is short: "I swear on my honor and conscience allegiance to the Slovak Republic. I will attend to the welfare of the Slovak people, and members of national minorities and ethnic groups living in the Slovak Republic. I will perform my duties in the interests of the citizens, upholding and defending the Constitution and other laws."

[¶](#)4. (C) If the campaign leaves any legacy, it is that of a President and his supporters exploiting suspicion and dislike among the majority of the country's citizens, i.e., "the Slovak people," toward the "members of national minorities and ethnic groups" living here. The so-called "Hungarian

card" was shamelessly played, and most analysts agree it was effective. President Gasparovic swept the north and center of the country, while Radicova captured the south and the largest cities, Bratislava and Kosice. The majority of ethnic Hungarians live in the south, which is where polls consistently show more positive attitudes between the two ethnic groups. As is often the case, it is not familiarity that breeds contempt; those who fear the Hungarian-speaking minority are those who have the least contact with them.

¶5. (C) The aftertaste among ethnic Hungarians is bitter, and the rhetoric of Slovak politicians during the campaign, including the Prime Minister, will serve to keep Slovak-Hungarian relations in the deep freeze. Not that the Slovak political class appears to care overly much. Many are too busy enjoying the "skodoradost" (Slovak for schadenfreude) brought on by Hungary's political and economic turmoil.

¶6. (C) The other lingering impression is that of Gasparovic not as an elder statesman, but as a Smer wannabe. Caught on video telling a group of Fico's faithful before the election that he felt "as if I were a Smer member," and that his defeat would be a catastrophe for both the party and the ruling coalition, Gasparovic clearly was attempting to rally the troops (he never seemed entirely sanguine about his re-election). But one wonders just what he may have pledged to Smer and its boosters. Interestingly, one industry insider claims that it is Gasparovic, more so than Fico or other government ministers, who has steered much business to one of Smer's most infamous and powerful sponsors, Juraj Siroky (septel). So, perhaps his statement was merely a

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straightforward admonition that the gravy train of government contracts could be disrupted if he were out of the picture.

#### More Intra-Opposition Strife

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¶7. (C) Meanwhile, at SDKU headquarters, Iveta Radicova's respectable showing in the campaign appears to have heightened divisions within the leading opposition party. "Chairman-for-life" Mikulas Dzurinda has made clear that he does not intend to cede any leadership position to Radicova. (Note: Radicova is a relative newcomer to politics, having joined SDKU in 2006). Shortly after the elections, SDKU MP and former Foreign Minister Kukan appeared eager to quash speculation about Radicova's future in the party, referring to her in the diminutive, he said he couldn't imagine "Ivetka" as the party's leader.

¶8. (C) For her part, Radicova seems to feel that the million votes she earned have entitled her to a promotion, i.e., she would like to be the SDKU election leader for the upcoming European Parliamentary race. If she doesn't receive this position, she has said she might quit the party. We have heard from Radicova confidants that, despite her public denials, she may be thinking about starting (yet another) political party. Several observers have suggested that, instead of building on a respectable electoral showing, this move would further weaken the anemic and schizophrenic opposition. We agree.

#### Advancing U.S. Equities

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¶9. (C) The Charge has requested a meeting with Gasparovic in order to deliver a congratulatory letter from President Obama. We will also use this opportunity to recall earlier conversations, including with former President Bush in October 2008, in which Gasparovic pledged to steadfastly support a strong transatlantic orientation in Slovak policy. We would also like to deliver the points on the upcoming

visit of Syrian President Asad requested ref (d), and to encourage continued and more robust Slovak engagement in Afghanistan.

¶10. (C) We should not expect President Gasparovic to stray far from Smer policy lines, but we will capitalize on his stated transatlantic inclinations, and will encourage Gasparovic when possible to take advantage of his final-term "independence" to counter some of the negative trends about which we have previously reported, e.g., problems in the judicial sector (ref b) and government corruption. And, although we will resist the temptation to remind President Gasparovic of his oath to attend to the welfare of all of Slovakia's citizens, Charge intends to convey our hope that the ethnically-tinged campaign can give way to a less confrontational and nationalistic political dialogue.

EDDINS